

Chapter 5

The Roles of State and Federal Agencies in California Groundwater Management

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Even though groundwater management is a local responsibility and mostly voluntary, several State and federal agencies have key roles in California groundwater management. Some of these roles may not be immediately recognized, but because they work toward the goal of maintaining a reliable groundwater supply, they are closely related to groundwater management. Some of the programs available through the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and other agencies that assist local agencies in managing groundwater resources are described below.

Local Groundwater Management Assistance from DWR

DWR's role in groundwater management begins with the fundamental understanding that groundwater management is locally driven and management programs should respond to local needs and concerns. DWR recognizes that when groundwater is effectively managed at the local level, benefits are realized at a statewide level.

DWR has historically maintained many programs that directly benefit local groundwater management efforts including:

- Providing assistance to local agencies to assess basin hydrogeologic characteristics,
- Assisting local agencies to identify opportunities to develop additional groundwater supply,
- Monitoring groundwater levels and quality,
- Providing watermaster services for court-adjudicated basins,
- Providing standards for well construction and destruction,
- Managing the State's extensive collection of well completion reports, and
- Reviewing proposals and distributing grant funds and low-interest loans for conjunctive use projects, as well as local groundwater management and monitoring programs.

Conjunctive Water Management Program

DWR's Conjunctive Water Management Program consists of a number of integrated efforts to assist local agencies in improving groundwater management and increasing water supply reliability.

One goal of the Integrated Storage Investigations (ISI) Program, an element of the Bay-Delta program, is to increase water supply reliability statewide through the planned, coordinated management and use of groundwater and surface water resources. The effort emphasizes forming working partnerships with local agencies and stakeholders to share technical data and costs for planning and developing locally controlled and managed conjunctive water management projects.

Toward that end, the Conjunctive Water Management Program has:

- Developed a vision in which DWR would assist local agencies throughout the State so that these agencies can effectively manage groundwater resources,
- Adopted a set of working principles to ensure local planning; local control, operation, and management of conjunctive use projects; voluntary implementation of projects; and local benefits from the proposed projects,
- Executed memoranda of understanding with 30 local agency partners and provided technical and financial assistance to study groundwater basins and assess opportunities for conjunctive water management,

- Provided technical assistance in the form of groundwater monitoring, groundwater modeling, and local water management planning, as well as a review of numerous regional and statewide planning efforts on a variety of water issues, and
- Provided facilitation assistance to promote broad stakeholder involvement in regional water management planning processes.

DWR staff review proposals and distribute grants pursuant to the Local Groundwater Management Assistance Act of 2000 (AB 303). To date, DWR has awarded more than \$15 million to local agencies to fund 71 projects dealing with groundwater investigation, monitoring, or management.

With funds provided under Proposition 13, DWR has awarded more than \$170 million in loans and grants for groundwater recharge and storage studies and projects to local agencies throughout the State. Applicant estimates of the water supply reliability increases that will be realized from these projects exceeds 150 thousand acre-feet annually. Recipients of loans and grants must provide progress reports to allow an evaluation of the successes of the various programs. Figure 10 shows the distribution of loan and grant awardees throughout the State.

Both grant programs have active outreach efforts to inform and to assist agencies in preparation of applications. Selection of projects for funding relies in part on input from advisory committees composed of stakeholders from throughout the State.

Box L Providing Data:

The Internet Makes Groundwater Elevation Data Readily Accessible to the Public

In 1996, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) began providing Internet access to groundwater level data and hydrographs for wells in groundwater basins throughout California. The website, which distributes historical data for more than 35,000 wells monitored by DWR and its many cooperators, has proven very popular, with more than 60,000 visits to date. Options include a form or map interface to locate wells with water level data and the ability to download long-term water levels for specific wells or seasonal measurements for specific areas to create groundwater contour maps. The accessibility of this data makes it a significant resource for local agencies in making sound groundwater management decisions. The address of the site is <http://wdl.water.ca.gov/>.



Wells can be located with a map interface. By clicking on a well, a hydrograph with the latest data available is automatically generated.

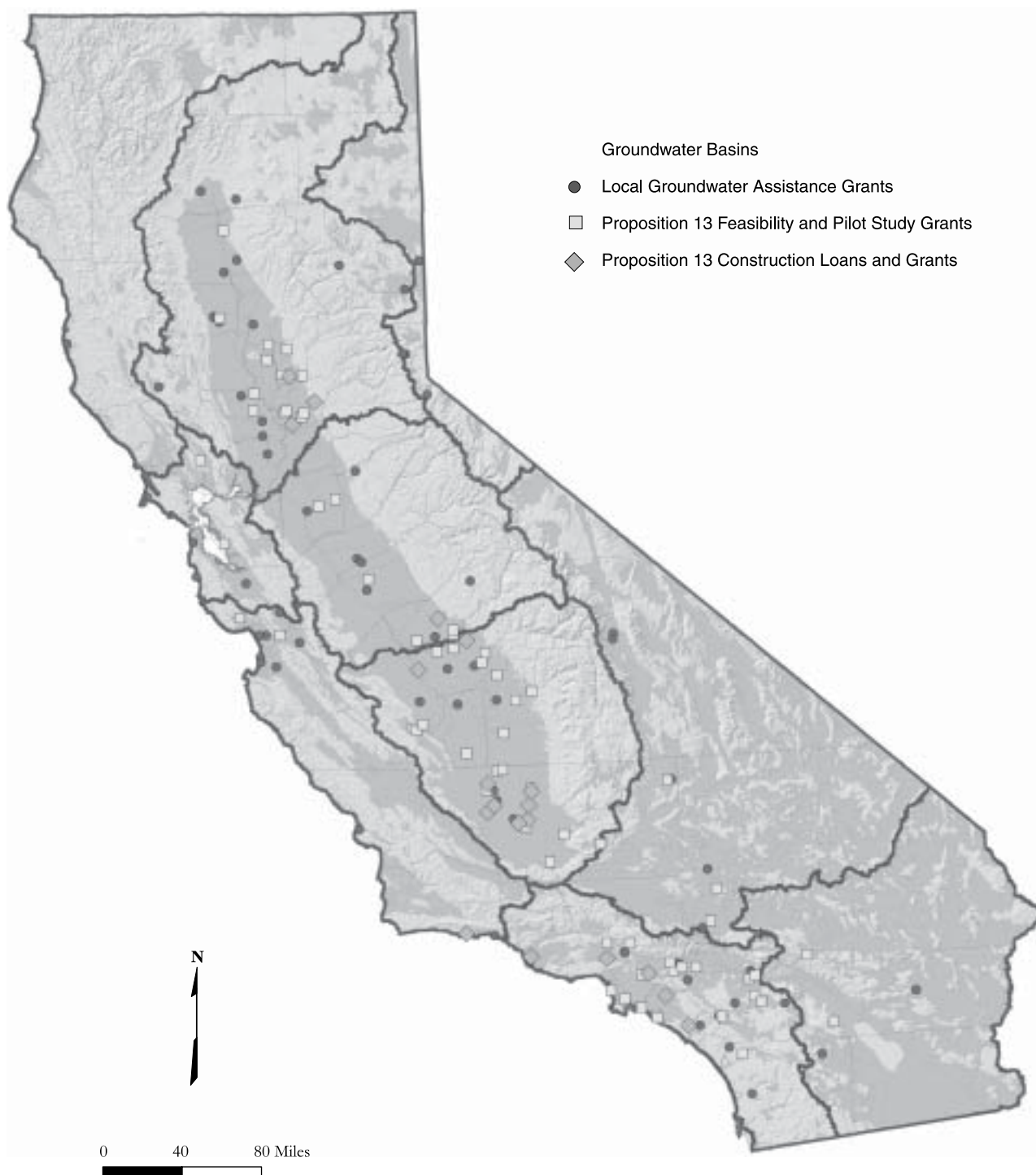


Figure 10 Broad distribution of grant and loan awardees for 2001 through 2003

Assistance from Other State and Federal Agencies

Many other State and federal agencies provide groundwater management assistance to local agencies. Some of those roles are described below. For more information on the roles of various agencies in protecting the groundwater resource, see the California Department of Health Services' Drinking Water Source Assessment and Protection Program Document (DHS 2000), California Groundwater Management (Bachman and others 1997), or the individual agency websites.

State Water Resources Control Board and Regional Water Quality Control Boards

<http://www.swrcb.ca.gov> The mission of the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) is to ensure the highest reasonable quality of waters of the State, while allocating those waters to achieve the optimum balance of beneficial uses. In turn, the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards (RWQCB) develop and enforce water quality objectives and implement plans to protect the beneficial uses of the State's waters, recognizing differences in climate, topography, geology, and hydrology.

SWRCB has many responsibilities regarding the protection of the groundwater resource. One of the more notable is the Groundwater Ambient Monitoring and Assessment (GAMA) Program. GAMA is a recently enacted program that will provide a comprehensive assessment of water quality in water wells throughout the state. GAMA has two main components: the California Aquifer Susceptibility (CAS) Assessment and the Voluntary Domestic Well Assessment Project.

The CAS combines age dating of water and sampling for low-level volatile organic compounds (VOCs), such as methyl tertiary-butyl ether (MTBE), to assess the relative susceptibility of all of approximately 16,000 public supply wells throughout the State. Age dating provides a general assessment of how quickly groundwater is moving through the system, while the sampling of low-level VOCs allows greater reaction time for potential remediation strategies before contaminants reach action levels. Sampling is being conducted by staff from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. The CAS Assessment was developed cooperatively with DHS and DWR.

The Voluntary Domestic Well Assessment Project will provide a previously unavailable sampling of water quality in domestic wells, which will assist in assessing the relative susceptibility of California's groundwater. Because water quality in individual domestic wells is unregulated, the program is voluntary and will focus, as resources permit, on specific areas of the state. Constituents to be analyzed include nitrate, total and fecal coliform bacteria, MTBE, and minerals. Additional constituents will be added in areas with known water quality problems.

Other SWRCB/RWQCB activities related to groundwater protection include developing basin plans that identify existing and potential beneficial uses of marine water, groundwater, and surface waters; regulating the discharge of waste that may affect water quality in California; monitoring of landfills and hazardous waste facilities; establishing standards for the construction and monitoring of underground storage tanks; establishing management plans for control of nonpoint source pollutants; and issuing cleanup and abatement orders that require corrective actions by the responsible party for a surface water or groundwater pollution problem or nuisance.

The Groundwater Quality Monitoring Act of 2001 (AB599, Water Code, § 10780 et seq.) required the SWRCB to develop a comprehensive monitoring program in a report to the Legislature. See Chapter 4 for details.

California Department of Health Services

<http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/ddwem> The DHS Drinking Water Program, part of the Division of Drinking Water and Environmental Management, is responsible for DHS implementation of the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, as well as California statutes and regulations related to drinking water. As part of this responsibility, DHS inspects and provides regulatory oversight of approximately 8,500 public water systems (and approximately 16,000 drinking water wells) to assure delivery of safe drinking water to all California consumers.

Public water system operators are required to regularly monitor their drinking water sources for microbiological, chemical and radiological contaminants to show that drinking water supplies meet regulatory requirements (called primary maximum contaminant levels—MCLs). Among these contaminants are approximately 80 specific inorganic and organic chemical contaminants and six radiological contaminants that reflect the natural environment as well as human activities.

Public water system operators also monitor their water for a number of other contaminants and characteristics that deal with the aesthetic properties of drinking water (known as secondary MCLs). They are also required by regulation to analyze for certain unregulated contaminants (to allow DHS to collect information on emerging contaminants, for example), and to report findings of other contaminants that may be detected during routine monitoring. The DHS water quality monitoring database contains the results of analyses since 1984. These data, collected for purposes of regulatory compliance with drinking water laws, also provide an extensive body of information on the quality of groundwater throughout the State.

California Department of Pesticide Regulation

<http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/dprprograms.htm> The California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) protects human health and the environment by regulating pesticide sales and use and by promoting reduced-risk pest management. DPR plays a significant role in monitoring for the presence of pesticides and in preventing further contamination of the groundwater resource.

DPR conducts six types of groundwater monitoring:

- 1) Monitoring for pesticides on a DPR-determined Ground Water Protection List, which lists pesticides with the potential to pollute groundwater;
- 2) Four-section survey monitoring to verify a reported detection and to help determine if a detected pesticide resulted from legal agricultural use;
- 3) Areal extent monitoring to identify the extent of contaminated wells;
- 4) Adjacent section monitoring to identify additional areas sensitive to pesticide movement to groundwater;
- 5) Monitoring to repeatedly sample a network of wells to determine whether pesticide residues are declining; and
- 6) Special project monitoring.

When pesticides are found in groundwater, they are normally regulated in one-square mile areas identified in regulation as sensitive to groundwater pollution. These pesticides are subject to permitting by the county agricultural commissioner and to use restrictions specified in regulation. DPR maintains an extensive database of pesticide sampling in groundwater and reports a summary of annual sampling and detections to the State Legislature.

California Department of Toxic Substances Control

<http://www.dtsc.ca.gov> The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) has two programs related to groundwater resources protection: the Hazardous Waste Management Program and the Site Mitigation Program. These programs are authorized under Division 20 of the California Health and Safety Code, and implementing regulations are codified in Title 22 of the California Code of Regulations.

A critical element of both programs is maintaining environmental quality and economic vitality through the protection of groundwater resources. This is accomplished through hazardous waste facility permitting and design; oversight of hazardous waste handling, removal, and disposal; oversight of remediation of hazardous substances releases; funding of emergency removal actions involving hazardous substances, including the cleanup of illegal drug labs; cleanup of abandoned hazardous waste sites; oversight of the closure of military bases; and pollution prevention.

If groundwater is threatened or impacted by a hazardous substance release, DTSC provides technical oversight for the characterization and remediation of soil and groundwater contamination. DTSC and the nine RWQCBs coordinate regulatory oversight of groundwater remediation. To ensure site-specific groundwater quality objectives are met, DTSC consults with RWQCB staff and appropriate groundwater basin plans.

Box M Improving Coordination of Groundwater Information

California's groundwater resources are addressed by an array of different State and federal agencies. Each agency approaches groundwater from a unique perspective, based on its individual statutory mandate. As a result, each agency collects different types of groundwater data and information. To facilitate the effective and efficient exchange of groundwater resource information, the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) is coordinating the Groundwater Resources Information Sharing Team (GRIST), which is composed of representatives from various groundwater agencies. Agencies currently participating in GRIST are:

- State Water Resources Control Board
- Department of Health Services
- Department of Water Resources
- Department of Pesticide Regulation
- Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory
- U.S. Geological Survey

One of the tasks of the GRIST is to identify data relevant to California groundwater resources. A listing of the data, along with the appropriate agency contacts and Internet links, will be maintained by SWRCB on the Groundwater Resources Information Database. In addition, to facilitate effective information sharing and communication among stakeholders, groundwater data will be made available on the SWRCB GeoTracker system. GeoTracker is a geographic information system that provides Internet access to environmental data. The centralization of environmental data through GeoTracker will enable more in-depth geospatial and statistical analyses of groundwater data in the future. For more information about GeoTracker, visit the GeoTracker Internet site at <http://geotracker.arsenautlegg.com>.

California Bay-Delta Authority

<http://calwater.ca.gov> The California Bay-Delta program was initiated in 1994 to develop and implement a long-term comprehensive plan that will restore ecological health and improve water management for beneficial uses of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta System. The partnership currently consists of more than 20 State and federal agencies. An important element of the program is to increase storage by developing an additional 500,000 acre-feet to 1.0 million acre-feet of groundwater storage capacity by the year 2007 (CALFED 2000).

Effective January 1, 2003, a newly formed State agency assumed responsibility for overseeing implementation of the Bay-Delta program. The California Bay-Delta Authority provides a permanent governance structure for the collaborative state-federal effort. The authority was established by enactment of Senate Bill 1653 in 2002. The legislation calls for the authority to sunset on January 1, 2006, unless federal legislation has been enacted authorizing the participation of appropriate federal agencies in the authority.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www.epa.gov/safewater> The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water, together with states, tribes, and many partners, protects public health by ensuring safe drinking water and protecting groundwater. The EPA's role in California groundwater is primarily related to protection of the resource and comes in the form of administering several federal programs in close coordination with State agencies such as SWRCB, DHS, and DTSC.

U.S. Geological Survey

<http://ca.water.usgs.gov> USGS has published results of many studies of California groundwater basins. USGS maintains an extensive groundwater level and groundwater quality monitoring network and has compiled this data in a database. The California District is working on cooperative programs with local, State, and other federal agencies. The most notable programs include three regional studies of the San Joaquin-Tulare Basin, the Sacramento River Basin, and the Santa Ana River basin under the National Water Quality Assessment Program. Results were published for the San Joaquin-Tulare Basin in 1995 and the Sacramento River Basin in 2000. The Santa Ana River basin study is in progress.

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

<http://www.usbr.gov> The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) operates the Central Valley Project (CVP), an extensive network of dams, canals, and related facilities that delivers about 7 maf during normal years for agricultural, urban, and wildlife use. USBR's role with respect to groundwater is generally limited to monitoring for impacts to the groundwater systems adjacent to its CVP facilities. Through the cooperative efforts of USBR, DWR, irrigation districts, farmers, and other local entities, groundwater level data have been collected continuously since project conception in the 1930s and 1940s.

In addition to CVP monitoring, USBR monitors groundwater levels to identify potential impacts as a result of two other projects in California. That monitoring includes the Santa Ynez basin as part of the Cachuma Project on the central coast, and the Putah Creek Cone as part of the Solano Project in the southwest Sacramento Valley. Both monitoring efforts are required as part of permitting for the projects.

USBR is planning to implement a groundwater information system to collect and distribute to the public the large volume of historical groundwater level data associated with its projects.